

35-Year-Old Shrine Visited by 49 Millions

By Jean White
Staff Reporter

"In this temple as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever."

Nearly every week, no matter what the weather, guards at the Lincoln Memorial have noticed the elderly man slowly climb the steps and stand silently before the statue of Abraham Lincoln.

They don't know his name. The legend is that he has been coming there since the Memorial was opened May 30, 1922. They say he must be in his nineties. No one knows for sure.

He comes, stands silently, and goes.

In a way, it is best for the elderly visitor to be nameless. He is a symbol of the more than 49 million persons who have come to the temple to show that the memory of Lincoln is enshrined forever in their hearts.

On that Memorial Day in 1922 when the shrine was dedicated, William Howard Taft gave it to President Warren Harding for the American people as "a shrine at which all can worship . . . a sacred refuge in which those who love country and love God can find inspiration and repose."

For millions of visitors, the white marble memorial has been a shrine and refuge.

More persons — 49,375,207 through last year—have visited the Lincoln Memorial than any other monument in the Nation's Capital, a city of monuments.

Among them is the elderly man who comes weekly. There is also the Congressman, who goes to the Lincoln shrine each time he returns to Washington from a trip and rereads the Gettysburg and the Second Inaugural Addresses inscribed

on the walls flanking the heroic statue.

"It gives me a lift," he explained very simply to a guard recently.

More than a half-century elapsed before the Nation erected the memorial to the uncommon man who became one of its greatest Presidents.

The first drive for a monument came just two years after Lincoln's assassination.

Bruce Catton writes of Lincoln's foreign policy in the Outlook Section. Page E1

The story of Lincoln's last birthday is in Parade Magazine Section.

David C. Mearns, an expert on Lincoln, points to the Civil War President's love of the theater. Page B1.

There was much talk, but the plans fell through. The years passed. It wasn't until February, 1911, that Congress created the Lincoln Memorial Commission with former President Taft as chairman.

Commission members chose a site—then a swamp—in Potomac Park against the advice of House Speaker Joe Cannon, who warned that "the malarial ague from these mosquitoes will shake it to pieces."

There the monument stands now, its white marble set off against a circular green lawn 1200 feet in diameter. It is

Lincoln's Shrine Draws 49 Millions in 35 Years

neither temple, palace nor tomb, yet partake of all of these.

The architectural lines are classical, based on the Parthenon, the temple of the Goddess Athena on the Acropolis in Athens. Within the classical framework, the Memorial motif symbolizes the Union of the States, for which Lincoln gave his "last full measure of devotion" as those lying in Arlington Cemetery just over the Potomac.

Surrounding the walls of the Memorial Hall is a colonnade of 44-foot-high Doric columns, representing the 36 states in the Union at the time of Lincoln's death. On the attic walls above the colon-

nade are inscribed the names of the 48 states that comprise the Union now.

The Memorial has had its critics. Some have said a "cold Greek temple" was incongruous as a shrine to a man of Lincoln's warmth. But those who visit the Memorial usually come in hushed reverence.

"It is as if they feel Lincoln's presence," the guards say.

And finally, they come to the statue of the Great Emancipator himself. It is Lincoln, the War President. He looks eastward toward the Capitol Dome. The gentleness, power and determination of the man has been caught not only in the face but the hands which grip the massive chair.

Sculptor Daniel Chester French designed the 19-foot seated statue. A family of Italian stonecutters—father and six sons named Piccirilli—carved it out of 28 blocks of Georgia white marble over 4 years.

Here visitors stand silent before the statue and read the inscription above: "In this temple as in the hearts of the people for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever."

